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## Mixed Migratory Flows - Immigration

By

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It is an honor for me to speak to you today as a representative of the United States Government, one of the co-sponsors of this conference. Last year, President Wade spoke of the important role of migrants: “L’émigration est une donnée permanente dans l’histoire des peuples et les migrants contribuent aussi bien à la prospérité de leur pays d’origine qu’à celle de leur pays d’accueil.”

Since time immemorial, people have left their countries in search of a better life for themselves and their families. They leave for many reasons, including the desire for economic improvement and family reunification and to escape war, civil conflict, and environmental degradation. According to the United Nations (U.N.), there are more than 190 million migrants in the world today, constituting approximately 3 percent of the world’s population. One does not have to search far in the news to find tragic examples of instances in which vulnerable migrants or refugees have died or been put in grave danger because of their attempts to leave their home countries. The subject of mixed migration flows deserves the attention of the international community. The United States (U.S.) is committed to the idea that mixed migration flows must be addressed in a collaborative and effective manner. We have learned through our own experience that partnerships must be nurtured amongst and within states and include international organizations and civil society.

What is fascinating to me about migration is its protean quality: sometimes migration is forced and sometimes it is voluntary. In fact, as Ambassador Swing noted, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (U.N.) has found that irregular migration accounts for a mere 10-15 percent of all migration. Sometimes it occupies an uneasy zone between the two. Millions of migrants are documented, many are not. In some countries documentation entitles migrants to generous benefits, in other places it does not.

This conference is an important one, and the issue is not new. In fact, my government has been supporting joint International Organization on Migration—United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (IOM-UNHCR) activities on mixed migratory flows in the Caribbean for over five years. We have seen first hand cooperation on intra-regional returns of trafficking victims as well as multi-lateral efforts amongst governments, UNHCR, and IOM to address the protection needs of asylum seekers.

I believe that there is a unique opportunity—created through this conference—for Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries to develop genuine partnerships permitting better treatment of migrants. If the partnership evolves, which I hope it will, it can improve the lives of those migrants living abroad and make migration policies more humane and better enforced. I have seen a regional cooperation occur in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

The U.S. believes the most practical way to advance effective, humane migration policies is to support regional migration dialogues. Regional dialogues promote open, informal discussion and information exchange on shared migration concerns. In these fora, member states identify areas for cooperation and develop migration strategies that are humane and stress orderly, authorized movements of individuals. The congenial, informal nature of these regional approaches allows

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governments to discuss migration issues of common interest, build consensus, and undertake joint initiatives to improve migration management and the situation of migrants in their regions.

I would like to offer an example for your consideration, a possible model for ECOWAS: the Regional Conference on Migration, one of the older consultative processes, in which North and Central American countries along with the Dominican Republic dialogue in an informal but serious manner about migration challenges and protection needs.

Turning again to this region, migration in West Africa is something of a bright spot. The end of civil strife in Sierra Leone and Liberia, thanks in part to the constructive role played by ECOWAS forces, has allowed . . . millions of voluntary returns of those who fled persecution and civil strife. The prevailing peace, however fragile, allows greater trust to emerge among governments in the region. This trust encourages governments to observe the provisions of the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, a ground breaking important initiative for ECOWAS countries.

Yet, the reverse of the medal is much more somber: we know that dozens of Africans have died in the past few months trying to take advantage of the calmer summer weather to make the journey to the Canary Islands and Spanish mainland to find jobs in Europe. At the end of October [2008], two African migrants were found dead after their wooden fishing boat packed with 125 migrants landed in Spain's Canary Islands. They had reportedly left Guinea and had been at sea for eight to ten days suffering from thirst, hunger, and exposure. The challenge for countries in the region is complex.

- How to effectively identify, protect, assist, process, and return each one of these individuals traveling in mixed flows
- How to identify the smuggler, the trafficker, from the unaccompanied child or the trafficking victim
- The economic migrant from the asylum seeker
- The stateless person when all are undocumented

The challenge for all of our countries is also about helping to prevent irregular flows, which can have such tragic consequences and pose a threat to national security.

The attacks in South Africa earlier this year show us that no country is immune from the fact that migrants can be vulnerable to mob violence during periods of economic hardship. What measures can governments introduce to make sure the human rights of migrants are respected?

Next, what are some trends we can see in migration among countries in the region? One trend we see in West Africa is the displacement of farmers and their families because of decertification and erosion. This phenomenon often gets lumped into urbanization and often involves people staying in the same country, but it is also a facet of the migration issue. In the same vein, how will climate change affect migration flows in the region?

It is with these questions and challenges in mind that my government strongly supports UNHCR and IOM in their mandated activities conducted to provide assistance and protection to those in need. More specifically, we work with UNHCR to promote the Agenda on Protection and support its activities around the world. Through IOM, we support the Migration Dialogue for West Africa, where ECOWAS countries come together to discuss migration-related issues of interest and best practices as well as regional anti-trafficking efforts and a fund to provide assistance to children trafficked in West Africa, which has assisted several hundred children over the past few years. It is our hope that both the 10-Point Plan and the Migration Dialogue can be further operationalized through a regional specific collaborative approach.